

30 x 30 and traditional fishing communities

The best way to protect nature is to protect the human rights of those who live among it and depend upon it.



Background

In December 2022, the city of Montreal hosted the single most important conversation about nature conservation for a generation. As a result, the world now has an ambitious framework that commits governments to restore nature and that recognises the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities as ‘custodians of biodiversity and partners in its conservation, restoration and sustainable use’¹.

The best known of the framework’s 23 targets is number 3: to protect at least 30 percent of land and marine areas by 2030. This is known as 30x30 and is the most extensive aquatic governance project in human history. Currently, only 8% of the ocean

is protected in some way,² which means that this commitment requires an almost quadrupling of ocean conservation efforts by 2030.

However, such an unprecedented scaling of conservation efforts brings several challenges, opportunities and trade-offs that will need thorough consideration by coastal states. There are enormous practical difficulties in putting 30x30 into practice effectively, and potentially widespread negative consequences to local communities and Indigenous peoples from doing so.

Blue Ventures is a conservation organisation. We recognise the critical importance of increasing ocean protection. And we believe that conservation led by communities, for communities, is the only viable pathway to protection of our coastal seas at scale.

Key opportunities

1. Properly protected areas are a cornerstone of conservation and sustainable fisheries

When properly managed and funded, protected areas can create win-wins for people and nature alike, replenishing fisheries and strengthening local livelihoods³. They are one of the most valuable tools we have to combat climate breakdown, coastal poverty and the damaging effects of industrial fishing. We urgently need more of them, and we urgently need to make sure existing areas live up to their promise. A 30x30 anchored in community-led conservation offers an unparalleled opportunity to achieve this.

2. Most nature exists where local communities and Indigenous peoples live

Local communities and Indigenous peoples manage or hold tenure over lands containing 80% of the world's biodiversity⁴. Along tropical coastlines, they govern or oversee areas of seabed covering tens of thousands of square kilometres⁵. They have often proved to be better stewards of these lands and fishing grounds than governments^{6,7}.

Key challenges

1. An ugly past

Over the last century, millions of people have been forced from their lands and fishing grounds in the name of conservation, often violently.⁸ While the pace of expulsion has slowed in recent years, the "no people allowed" approach of traditional fortress conservation continues, and as such, any attempt to highly or fully protect 30% of the planet risks more of the same: more violations of fundamental human rights, more

conflict, more violence, with these impacts falling disproportionately on those who are the most marginalised and least responsible for the biodiversity crisis.

2. A poor track record

30x30 isn't the first global plan to save nature. In 2011, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) agreed on 20 nature protection targets, covering everything from tackling pollution to protecting coral reefs. That plan was a complete failure: none of the targets were met, and only six were partially achieved. In the rush to create more protected areas, speed trumped quality. Many of the protected areas established are so-called 'paper parks', and lack the financing, management, local engagement and enforcement they need to deliver the promised biodiversity and societal benefits⁹.

Our position

Blue Ventures believes that the best way to protect nature is to protect the human rights of those who live among it and depend upon it.

For the implementation of 30x30 to be equitable, effective and successful, it is critical for governments and the conservation sector to enact the following nine commitments.

Defend the rights of communities

1. Secure tenure for all

Recognise and respect coastal communities' title, tenure, access, and resource rights to land and ocean. Adhere to and uphold international agreements and norms, including the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.

2. A chance to say no

Recognise that Free, Prior and Informed Consent means respecting the rights of communities and Indigenous peoples to *not* participate in the 30x30 process and *not* have their territories designated as protected areas or Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

3. A global commitment to justice

Ensure that the burdens and benefits arising from protection are shared justly and equitably, so that the earth's most vulnerable people are not disproportionately afflicted. In line with the commitments in the framework, recognise and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and ensure their full and meaningful participation and decision-making in fulfilling the 30x30 commitment.

4. Gender justice

Explicitly recognise women's equal rights to natural resources – as outlined in target 23 of the framework – and ensure their full and meaningful participation and leadership in decision-making relating to the implementation of conservation measures to fulfil the 30x30 commitment.

5. Transparency and accountability

For protected areas where there is a high degree of government involvement and a strict level of protection, establish open and robust grievance mechanisms to resolve tenure disputes and ensure community voices are heard and elevated at the international level. Require robust, internationally recognised human rights safeguards and accountability mechanisms. Ensure that protected area authorities report publicly on these dimensions and tie continued funding to performance.

Champion community-led conservation

6. Community stewardship of near-shore waters

Explicitly recognise Indigenous peoples and local communities as primary decision makers in conservation efforts. Ensure that Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are the default mechanisms for conservation in coastal waters and network them together – ecologically and socially – to maximise benefits for people and nature alike. Strive to make 30% of individual areas highly protected, particularly where they cover key habitats. Recognise that conservation is about less destruction as well as more protection and establish community-driven exclusion zones across all suitable areas of coastal waters to help counteract threats like destructive industrial fishing.

7. More innovative, community funding

Develop and implement sustainable & flexible long-term funding for community-based initiatives like LMMAs and OECMs at regional and national levels, making use of innovative approaches to channel funds directly to local organisations and community associations. Recognise the potential of LMMAs and OECMS to achieve lasting conservation outcomes, with funding tied to performance.

8. Simpler legal frameworks

Streamline and simplify legal frameworks at national levels for community-based initiatives like LMMAs and share best practice globally through learning networks.

9. Better small-scale fisheries management and data

Transform access to information and empower communities to adaptively manage and rebuild their fisheries through digital data collection, analysis and reporting. Increase ambition and support for basic skills, training and market information to reduce spoilage and losses, improve quality and earn fairer prices.

Ultimately, 30x30 can only succeed if it emphasises the primacy of human rights, and puts communities first. Only a community-led 30x30 can ensure that fundamental rights aren't extinguished and equity isn't undermined in the rush to deliver the additional conservation our ocean so badly needs. Only a community-led 30x30 can benefit people and nature alike, delivering sustainable fisheries, vibrant oceans, and improved food security for over a billion people.

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Find out more

Blue Ventures is a marine conservation organisation that puts people first. We support coastal fishers in remote and rural communities to rebuild fisheries, restore ocean life and build lasting pathways to prosperity.

Our work began two decades ago in Madagascar's remote coastal communities and is growing globally.

Across more than a dozen countries, we're partnering with traditional fishers and community organisations to design, scale, strengthen and sustain fisheries management and conservation at the community level.

We bring partners together in networks to advocate for reform, and share tools and best practices to support fishing communities across the globe.

To learn more about our advocacy work, visit

blueventures.org/advocacy

You can email us at info@blueventures.org. We'll get back to you within 48 hours, but if you don't hear from us, please give us a call on +44 (0)117 3144 661

You can reach us Monday to Friday, between 9am and 6pm (UK).